

Dark of Night

by Secret Sin

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Summary: "She did not close her eyes; she would not look away as death befell her. She would not die a coward. She saw the flash of light gleam upon the steel and tensed, preparing for the blow." Love, family, death, loss, drug lords, ancient traditions, territorial Wolves, possessive Oni and the fate that binds them all together. Kyoto may never be the same. Modern!AU.

Dark of Night

Hmm, so...this is pretty much me attempting to counteract the writer's block that I've recently found myself suffering, an attempt to bait the muse into coming back as it were. I'm still mostly writing for Yu Yu Hakusho (or trying to anyway) and this is probably going to remain as nothing more than a one-shot (though I do have ideas for otherwise, I'm not sure I want to delve head first into another writing project). **This is actually something I wrote quite a while ago, while - it should be noted - I had a bad flu and was in the awful, weird bliss that comes with cold medicine, so if some parts of this seem odd or down right strange please forgive me. I did my best to fix up the blatant lack of plot and the bizzare rambling sentences - I even rewrote whole sections of this a few times in attempts to make it all work out the way I wanted it to, though I'm still not happy with the ending.**

**A quick Note:

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**This is an AU and Chizuru might seem out of character because of that. In my head there is an entire back-story and plot to explain some oddness, and while I did attempt to hint at it a little, there really is no way to fit everything in into a single chapter. The jest of it is, though, that this takes place in modern times and as such Chizuru - without the war tearing her family apart - would have been raised with her brother and the rest of her family and would have had different experiences because of it. Also, because this is in today's

time, I made Chizuru a little more independant and kick-ass to reflect the fact that time have changed and that women in today's world are not chained down to the ideals of the stay-at-home demure wife-mother. She is still pretty shy, but she's a bit more savvy and bad-ass than the Chizuru of the Bakumatsu.

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Readers are adored, reviewers worshiped, and ConCrit absolutely necessary to my continued existence.

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I do not own Hakuouki or its many lovely characters.

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- Sin

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><p>Dark of Night_

_ **A Prolog**

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><p>The skin exposed to the night air burned and ached from the bitter cold of winter. Her lungs felt tight in her chest, pained by the frigid air, her breaths - when she neared a street light and could see them - were wispy and nearly tangible as they left her. She had been walking for hours, her feet soar and blistered in her old boots, her frame shivering beneath the many layers she had buried herself in earlier that morning when she had stood in the familiar grey world of Tokyo. The city of her birth still and silent in the wane hours before the buzz of life lite the restless city and breathed life into the dull streets.<p>

She had arrived in Kyoto in the weak sunlight of the early hours of the day alone and determined, nearly the entirety of the parts of her life she actually could say she loved crammed into a single worn leather bag that was older than she was. There would be hell to pay, when the realization of her absence was made, but she couldn't quite bring herself to worry over it. With her brother entangled as he was with the dull and dangerous world of politics, there was only her to look for what had been lost. Kaoru had trusted her with that task, had placed his faith in her to find Kodo and bring the only father they had ever known back to them and helped her slip away. She couldn't fail him. She had left the city she had known as home for so long with a mission in her mind and in her heart, and not even the gods - should they dare interfere - would be able to stop her.

The cold, however, very well might. As could - she suspected - the leering faces of the men she could just make out in the shadows that lined the vacant street. She had been wandering from neighborhood to neighborhood; making ever widening circles around the burnt and abandoned remains of the clinic that had belonged to her much beloved uncle and now, with night settled ominously over the city and her sense of direction completely upended, she found herself creeping ever deeper into the worst parts of the city. The buildings she

passed were dingy and dark, pock marked with age and graffiti. Women stood in clothing unsuited for the bitter chilled weather and called to the men that passed by, their bodies poised in provocative angles and their make up too heavy. The men that she passed, her shoulders pulled up and her head tilted down beneath the hood she wore, drank and gambled and shouted to one another loudly from their places on stoops of buildings or in the mouths of alleyways or milling about on the streets and sidewalks. Once night had fallen, their numbers had grown, their lives geared towards the promises of the dark and its shroud. But she had long surpassed them, pressing onward throughout the night until even the most weathered of night owls had given up and returned to their roosts, the sun threatening to return to the place once again in a few scarce hours.

She hunched her shoulders a little higher as she walked, hands fisted in the not-warm-enough fabric of her coat in the vague attempt to draw feeling back into the frigid digits. She could, at least, draw some semblance of comfort from the fact that the men currently stalking her undoubtedly believed her to be a boy. There were worst fates to be had then being mugged in the dead of a winter night, and she was glad - distantly - that she had shrugged on the loose, familiar clothes left by her brother for her use when she had been preparing to leave. A girl by herself in such a neighborhood was unlikely to make it through unscathed. If she was lucky, the thugs clocking her would let her go by unbothered, not thinking the meager form of the boy walking through their territory and battered bag he wore worth the effort.

Then again, she should know better than to think luck on her side.

"Hey kid." She didn't flinch at the hoarse voice that suddenly sounded from ahead of her, instead only paused in her steps to look up at the figures that blocked her path. There were three of them, all a touch too big, a touch too mean and a touch too drunk for her to handle if they decided to try and attack. Which they would, she knew. She had often been accused of being sheltered, of having been shielded from the gruesomeness of the world and the hardships that could be found outside the life she had been born into. Such accusations never took into consideration the details of her life, of the duties thrust upon her since her earliest memories and the rigidity of her upbringing. Growing up had been a survival of its own kind, and from her awkward pretense of a childhood she had earned instincts for people and their actions. Instincts that burned at the back of her mind in that very moment. The men before her would attack her; there was no doubt about that fact.

The leader grinned at her, his breaths coming out in quick, muddled pants as he leveled drunk-red eyes upon her. " 's a nice bag you got there kid. Real nice." He staggered forward, just enough alcohol in his system to daze him but not enough to make him weak to any attack she might try. In the movies and in TV shows she had seen, situations such as the one she was in usually went along the line of the muggers and intended victims going back and forth for a while, the victim meekly explaining how she just wanted to get home or how she didn't want any trouble. The muggers, of course, took that time to circle as they laughed at the stupidity of their victim, the overly pretty nit only realizing how very stupid her dawdling was until it was too late. Then, all according to script, the thugs would attack. The victim would lose precious openings to run and would have her

attackers hot on her heels should she even manage to do so.

She wasn't one for televised clichés, however.

Instead, she pulled her hands from her pockets, feigned to the left in a quick motion before twisting to her right and heading for the center of the street. It would be easier for them to follow her if she ran down the middle of the road as opposed to the sidewalk, but it was better lit and she had a better chance of being seen and helped if by some miracle a cop managed to appear. Her would-be attackers remained behind for a few, wonderful seconds, confused by her sudden about face and run - they had seen all the same movies she had it seemed - before shouting and taking chase. The slight advantage she had gained by surprising them would not last; she didn't know the lay of the land, not like they would. It would be easy, even as drunk as the small band was, for them to out maneuver her in the unfamiliar territory. She could potentially just out run them, she was not the fastest of her kind but she could easily out do a human if she pushed, but the past weeks had been difficult. The anxiousness that had plagued her since Kodo's disappearance had made even the most delicious food revolting, and sleep had been fleeting to her worried mind. Her body, as a result, was weak and unwilling to her efforts, and the wear of travel had not helped matters. Oni were strong, but they were not invincible, and she was so tiredâ€¦

Behind her, she could hear their ragged, uneven breaths mingling with their furious curses. The thrum of their unevenly pounding hearts and the cadence of their slurred words growing closer with each footfall, the distance between her and her pursuers being devoured quickly by heavy steps. Her own heart pounded painfully in her chest as she ran, her lungs aching from the cold air and the exertion of her flight. She felt light headed; it had been almost two days since she had anything substantial - her last meal of any substance being a small bag of crackers and a bottle of water during her long journey on the train - and the effects of her poor care for herself were becoming harder to ignore. She couldn't keep up her pace as it was; she would run out of energy long before they ran out of will to chase her, and what little hope she had of someone interfering was dwindling rapidly the deeper into the neighborhood she ran. Leaving the well-lit street was risky; she could easily run down the wrong alleyway and end up at a dead end or with a group of men even worse than the ones chasing her, but it was a risk her instincts told her she needed to take. She wouldn't last much longer otherwise.

She saw the black mouth of a narrow path between two buildings and dove for it. The alley was rank and littered with the refuse of the slums of the city but it was better than nothing. She pressed herself along the wall of the one building, hoping to blend with the shadows as she tried to both quickly and quietly dash down the dark path. Something - a nail or a rusted skeletal bone of some long forgotten fire escape - stuck out from between two of the grime stained bricks and bit into her, tearing through her leather coat and her woolen sweater and biting hungrily into her skin and muscle. She hissed between her teeth at the pain, her hand moving to press against the open wound even as she still ran onward. Her blood was hot against her frozen fingers, so much so that it actually seemed to burn, the chill of her cold hand just barely registering against the ragged edges of the wound. It wasn't healing as it should, the skin and torn muscle not stitching itself back together in a few uncomfortable moments as she was used to it doing. Her body was even weaker than

she had been concerned it had been; how long had it really been since she had had a decent night's rest?

She came to the end of the alley, thankful for the fact that it didn't simply stop at a brick wall and no chance of escape, and slipped around the corner of the intersection as quickly as she could. They were behind her, the gap opening up little by little, and she could hear them drunkenly urging each other on. The path ahead of her disappeared into the pitch black of the unknown but just ahead she could see a dumpster with piles of old, half molded cardboard boxes stacked about it haphazardly. It wouldn't be pleasant, but hiding amongst the mess was most likely her best bet of surviving her first night in Kyoto. It would give her time, at least, to dig through her bag for the only real source of defense she had left.

With the men's shouts growing louder in her ears she scrambled her way against the wall and crouched down behind the boxes. She tried to silence her heavy breathing as she slid the pack from its heavy place upon her back and dropped it as quietly as she could before her on the dirty ground. They had made it to the intersection if the two alleys, loudly shouting to each other as to whether to go to the right or the left and silently prayed to whatever Deity may be listening that they chose wrong and she could silently make her escape. Her heart was hammering in her chest, her head pounding painfully as she forced herself to take shallow, quiet breaths instead of the loud, gasping lungful's she wanted. They chose the left alley. The alley she was hidden in.

She really was a stranger to luck.

Her numb, blood stained fingers slipped uselessly upon the buckles of her bag, her desperation to get to her Kodachi tempered by her unwillingness to be heard. They were getting closer, their pace made slower by the haze of the alcohol in their systems and the uncertainty of whether she was actually there. If they passed by at a run they would miss her, but if they continued at the pace they were at they could see her, or perhaps hear her muffled breaths and follow the ragged sound to her hiding place. The leader shouted loudly for her to give up, the other two following suit with drunken chuckles pockmarking their jeers as they clumsily picked their way down the alley. Her hands trembled on the buckles, her breathing becoming more and more difficult to control as they neared. There was soft sound, an undercurrent her sharp ears could only just perceive, but that she recognized easily. The swift, soft hiss of a sharpened blade cutting through the cells of the very chilled air she was breathing and the subtle slide of metal through flesh.

Then, with a frightened squeal of panic and pain from one of her attackers, what little calm was left of the bitter winter night came crashing down around her in bloody, splintered pieces.

From her place huddled in her damp hiding place, she could see only the uneven dirty bricks of the opposite wall and the half-rotted carcasses of the boxes she was crouched behind, but she could still hear. The amused, drunken calls of her pursuers quickly turned confused and angry as they turned their attentions upon their own attackers, the one who had been injured sounding frantic and fearful as he fought with the wielder of the blade that had been driven into him. The leader, the lumbering man with the thick eyebrows and sallow

skin and the self-assured frame of one accustomed to winning the fights he inevitably ended up in, howled angrily at the unseen intruders. She could hear his shuffling, heavy steps and his furious shout as the injured man suddenly squealed and shrieked in horror, the sickening slippery noises of a sword quickly and repeatedly being driven hilt deep into living flesh forcibly thrust into her mind. The third man screamed, high, animalistic terror choking his voice as he too was attacked by the unknown figures. Her stomach rolled as she heard a heavy, wet thud, the knowledge of just what " just _who_ " it was sending the acidic burn of bile to the back of her throat.

She clenched her fists around the fabric of her bag and gritted her teeth, forcing away her instinctive need to dig into a deep hole and curl in upon herself, to whimper and cry like she used to when she had been very young and the storms would come crashing down upon her cold dark home. As high hungry keening noises began filling the air, voices that seemed almost human though her mind simply refused to accept such a thought, twisting the stillness of the alley with the high, manic laughter of the truly insane. Her hearted sputtered to a frightened stop as words began to slip into the laughing, hiss-like to her keen ears, her rebelling mind unable to shut out the word that was being all but sung by the unseen assailants. Her hands shook through the bone-creaking on her bag as she all but ripped the leather satchel open and dug inside. She had been careful when packing the heirloom, intent on hiding its shape from view by wrapping it in her clothes early that morning, but as she heard the sounds of the attackers - of the Murderers " ravaging the bodies of their victims, she realized how foolish that idea had been. She had packed the Kodachi specifically for the purpose of using it for defense if she needed it, and now that she _did_...

Her head spun with the surge of terror-induced adrenaline coursing through her veins and masking the ill-effects of her poor sleep and low energy, her heart pounding painfully in her chest as a sound that would haunt her dreams for years to come filled the suddenly too-still air, the slippery, sickening noises of bodies being torn apart piece by wretched piece drilled themselves into her mind with the same savagery the attackers were showing their victims. Unable to control her breathing any longer in her panicked daze, her breaths came out in quick, loud pants as she dug her small sword free. Her clothes falling to the ground and quickly staining from the thick, sluggish not-water that puddled in uneven floor of the alley, forgotten and forsaken in her desperation for a weapon.

"Blood...you're _bleedingâ€|_" The voice was almost child-like in its tones, joyful and high and insane as it drifted down from above. Her body began to shake as she tilted her head upward, not wanting to look upon the monster that undoubtedly staring down upon her but desperate not to let death befall her while she looked away like a coward. The trembling of her hand stilled as it rested on the worn and ancient hilt of her Kodachi, comfort found in the touch of the worn weave beneath her calloused palm. Her eyes grew wide as she lifted her gaze and stared up in horror at the _thing_ that had found her. "I can smell it...so _delicious_." The voice was all but a _purr_ and she felt the familiar churn of nausea tug at her empty stomach. As her eyes focused on the frame the sensation intensified until she had to forcibly swallow the bile back down.

He was, _it_ wasâ€|

No. It wasn't.

For a long, dizzying moment, she had thought it was one of The People. Thought the fall of long hair to be silver in the dim light of the alley and the fangs gleaming down at her red and hungrily to be the elegant curves of her predatory people butâ€|no, _no._ The creature peering down at her hungrily did so with manic red eyes not found in one of the People in their Skin, his hair not silver but a curtain of corpse-white falling down around him, dark at the uneven ends with the stain of fresh blood. He was not one of The People. _It_ was not, _couldn't_ be.

He was gripping a blood-stained Katana, his gleaming red eyes eerie in the dim light of the city as he stared not at _her_ - she realized â€" but at the ragged wound staining her arm with the bright red of life. Staring at her _blood_. A chill that had nothing to do with the harshness of winter danced with viscous glee down her spine and raised the fine hairs upon the nape of her neck. Her head swam as she cast a quick glance behind the creature, red and death filling her vision as a once-living person stared out at her from the grime of the alley floor, another white haired figure crouched over the corpse draining it of blood with wicked glee. In the glacial air the warm red puddle growing around his body steamed, curls of intangible mist curling upward to the sky, a soul escaping its brutalized host. Her stomach clenched and rolled and she wanted desperately for the umpteenth time that horrible night to scramble away and heave until her empty stomach cramped and twisted in pain and her body collapsed from the strain her body and mind was under. The creature standing over her lifted his sword, eyes like small red stars in the empty white of his eyes as he brought his weapon down in a fatal arch towards her huddled form.

Instinct alone saved her from being split from end to end by the monster's deadly swing, a lifetime of drills and training spinning her movement into something as fluid and instantaneous as drawing a breath. She hadn't even realized she had managed to pull her Kodachi free of its sheath until the sound of the blades shrieking from the collision rang through the air and she felt the jarring force of the powerful blow ricochet down her arm, jarring her bones painfully. Her hands were slick with her own blood, trembling from cold and exhaustion and fear, but her grip on her weapon was sure and steady. Showing more certainty than she felt she managed to settle her feet beneath her and force her diminutive weight upwards, pushing her would-be killer back.

The indignant, furious shriek of the creature - forced back by a surge of power she didn't truly have to lose - caught the attention of the other two feeding creatures and brought more hungry, demented red gazes turning to her shaking form. Eyes wide at their garish figures she took a half step back, her short sword shaking in her hands as black dots appeared in her sight. She was simply too worn for the dire situation she had found herself in, not even her supernatural blood and the surge of adrenaline able to help ease the wear of sleepless nights and long, hungry days. There were three of them, three of the impossible, hungry creatures that had already taken down the three human thugs she had known she wouldn't have been able to survive. They would kill her. That, her instincts told her, was a fact.

She wouldn't go without a fight though. _Couldn't._

Childhood memories trickled into her mind with a sharp clarity. Hours in a quiet dojo, her brother at her side as they spent hours performing Kata until their muscles burned and their small frames shook to the point they could no longer stand, let alone hold their weapons. Training with real swords taller than she was with men that had decades on her. A stern faced Master with a sharp voice and high expectations that would be met, never mind how many broken bones or injuries she sustained in the process. She had never been the most skilled; Kaoru had always been the fighter, the strong one with the warrior's heart beating in his chest and coloring his aura. Her protector and guardian during the long days and brutal nights. She had always been the healer, the caretaker with instincts that instructed her to nurture and tend. But when it came down to it, she was skilled enough. She would not allow for her life to be stolen from her so easily, not when so much was weighing upon her shoulders. She would not allow her death to dishonor her family, to haunt her brother with her pathetic inabilities. She _wouldn't_.

She leveled her breathing, forcing her panic and exhaustion out with each exhale as she slowly slipped into a fighting stance. Her muscles took to the form easily despite the bone deep ache of the cold and the hours of walking she had done that day, years of muscle memory taking some of the weight of the Kodachi off her frame. She focused her eyes on to her foes, tracking the eerie, almost bird-like movements of the death-pale creatures with a sharp, critical gaze. The dark spots that had begun crowding her vision intensified at her movements, but she forced them away with a steely determination and a few more even breaths. One hit. She would land at least one hit before she allowed herself to fall to their blades and blood-thirst. One hit, in the right place could be all she needed; she could - just maybe - take one of them down. Drag one of the monsters down to the gates of the underworld with her in death.

The one she had thrown away from her laughed the same insane cackle, lifting his sword to his too-widely smiling face and lapped at the blood soaked blade with his tongue like a cat sipping from a bowl of warm milk. Her head swam at the action, revulsion chilling her insides far better than the bitter chill of the night ever could. He leered at her, his hand tightening upon the hilt of his sword tightly a fraction of a second before he lunged, manic voice high and strained by insanity and an animalistic thrill of the hunt. She met the horizontal swing with the flat of her Kodachi, her wounded arm jarred and pained by the impact, it still hadn't healed completely and the bitter cold of the night was only making the pain bitter and intense. She gritted her teeth against the pain and the wave of dizziness that rushed her system and threatened to bring her to her knees, hand tightening upon the hilt of her sword to the point that she could feel the fine bones of her hand grinding against each other under the strain. He was powerful, despite his clear mental skewing, and it took all her might not to stumble beneath the blow and fall to the dirty, trash-strewn alley floor. He was clumsy; at least, his swings wild and sloppy and she found herself taking an opening in his stance before she even realized she had seen it. Driving the sharp edge of her Kodachi up towards his chest with a single, quick motion that she remembered "in a faraway part of her mind" having practiced for weeks and months on end before her Master decided her motions up to his standards. The blade split slipped through his skin

easily, slicing through flesh and muscle, scraping gratingly against the smooth bone of his sternum and ribs as her Kodachi buried itself to the hilt beneath the force of her blow. She missed his heart by mere centimeters, but that " she knew " would be enough.

She wrenched her blade free from his chest, stepping back just in time to miss the sloppy swing of a second sword aimed at her head, the hiss of steel perilously close even as she evaded the blow. The other two, seeming less frantic than their fellow " she wondered, with a cool logic that seemed foreign to her, if the blood they had stolen and sipped from the bodies of their victims had in any way soothed some of the madness from their frames - were no less mad than their companion and seemed all the more agitated by their fellow's falling. They shrieked and laughed and called for her blood, their faces smeared red and the light blue of the jackets they wore stained irreparably by the lives they had stolen. She stumbled as she stepped back, her foot catching on her discarded pack and sending her weakened form tumbling backwards to the cold, dirty ground. The two grinned down at her with wide, wicked grins and terribly glee in their eyes, only to be shoved away by pale hands marred by a dark, slick substance before they could pounce upon her like they had.

She was not the sort of girl to gasp, it was not something she really thought appropriate outside books and stories of fair maidens and damsels in distress, but upon seeing the garish figure of the creature she had just stabbed looking down upon her, his broad chest oozing the same dark substance as was upon his hands, she was unable to help the startled sound from leaving her shaking body. It was his blood, staining his corpse-white figure, dark and dead and slow to leave him in the terrible cold of the night. She had stabbed him cleanly in the chest, missing his heart she knew, but skewering at least his lung and tearing apart uncountable number of arteries. He should have been choking and gasping upon the ground, pierced lung filling with blood and drowning him as he bled to death. Not standing over her, eyes gleaming with fury and murderous hunger, not standing so certain and sure on his feet.

What the hell _were_ they?

The Katana in his black-bloodied hands rose, slow and promising as a final mad grin pulled his lips into a smile so wide she couldn't think how the skin of his face didn't split and tear from the strain of it. She knew, with a certainty so deeply ingrained into her body and soul that it hurt far more than any physical wound would ever be able to, that she would be unable to deflect the blow like she had done the last. Her head was pounding and her body was weak with exhaustion, mind taxed to the point of shutting down completely by the dark impossibility of the situation she had unexpectedly fallen into. The short burst of power she had tapped into before had been desperate and temporary, doing more to drain her than anything else with her reckless attempt to draw from it. This time she would be unable to dodge or retaliate. This time, she really would die.

Her hand spasmed around the hilt of her Kodachi, her breaths coming in fast, terrified pants as she saw the sword begin its swift arch down to her vulnerable body. She did not close her eyes; she would not look away as death befell her. She would not die a coward. She saw the flash of light gleam upon the steel and tensed, preparing for the blow. As the blade tore through the air, a deadly arch of flashing steel singing down towards her prone body, she saw in her

mind's eye her brother. Kaoru, smiling and kind and warm, her only true companion in the world, her safety and security. She wished, for the first time since she had left in the dark early hours of the morning, that her loyalty to Kodo was less than what it was, that she had stayed in the hellish safety of her Clan's territory. Not for herself, she doubted death would truly hold many surprised for one such as her, but for Kaoru, for her brother who would be left behind to mourn her. They had made a promise, hadn't they? The night before she had left, to always return to one another. She couldn't return from death though, not even their kind could do such impossible things as all that.

The blade fell, and she waited, heart heavy, for the blow to land.

It never did.

The butterfly soft brush of cold air danced gently across her face, the disturbed air just strong enough as it pressed over her skin to tug softly at the loose strands of her hair like a playful child. There was a moment of stillness, the world coming to a quiet pause, before it was broken by the furious shriek of steel clashing against steel. A shadow, nearly as dark and subtle as the night that fell around them, shifted and moved before her with all the languid grace of a predator, the flash of a sword in the dim light the trace of the figure's movements her eyes could follow. The creature she had wounded screamed and shrieked, its sword falling to the uneven pavement with a clatter as its hands were neatly severed from its damaged body. The other two monstrous beings quickly jumped to retaliate, only for both to suddenly jerk and drop to the ground in a jarring, awkward movement she could not quite understand. Not until their heads slipped away cleanly from their shoulders to tumble to the bloody floor of the alley, a wide spray of the dead-black blood that their bodies contained gushing out in a wide arch. She felt the fine hot mist upon her face, splattering her with the black substance like the Jackson Pollock paintings she liked so very much, and she felt her head sputter and spin at the meaning of the warm liquid dotting her face.

The shadow had moved again without her even realizing, drifting through the cold night air with all the quick elegance of a big cat. The gleam of light upon the figure's sword an elegant dance of movement as her saving shadow quickly dispatched what remained of her almost-killer. In seconds, all three nightmarish figures lay as dead as the thugs they themselves had slaughtered, their dark blood spilling out and mingling with the crimson pools created by their earlier killing spree. She could only sit, terrified, as she saw the shadow turn towards her and gain details in the dull light.

A man she would guess to be only a few years more than her own twenty years, stood tall and silent before her. The action mirrored those of the monster that he had just killed and had it not been for the odd gleaning look in his sharp eyes she might have been sent scrambling for her Kodachi, but his eyesâ€¦Intense and lovely, a shade of blue steeped with the deep violet of the ending day, they were intelligent andâ€¦almost kind, if she looked carefully in the dim light. They seemed _off_...somehow, though. Older, almost, the sort of eyes she usually only saw in the faces of the oldest members of the Clans, not in the face of a handsome young man staring down at her in a dark alley. It wasâ€¦jarring, unsettling.

He was dressed nearly entirely in black, complimenting his pale face and chin-length black hair nicely with the subtly of the color. His clothes were nondescript at a glance, but even in the low light she could tell their quality and assume at the meaning of the cut of the cloth. Military, almost, or perhaps police. Official and dangerous, only offset by the white scarf wound about his neck in defense of the cold and the familiar light blue jacket he wore. The same, she realized with a solid lump in her stomach, that the blood-thirsty creatures that had attempted to kill her " that the strange man before her had killed " had worn. The soft blue of a summer sky, edged with a crisp white, the cut sharp and formal but made so that those wearing it could move freely. The stranger that stood over her wore one slightly different, a patch upon each shoulder and above his heart offering her the image of a proud looking wolf, fiercely curled around a few words she could not make out in the dark alley, though the single number three that blazed above it was clear. The meaning of the jacket did not quite settle in her mind, her thoughts sliding off of the fact with a surprising ease that might have worried her if she didn't feel so very detached from everything.

The man's attention settled on her with impossibly sharp precision, not wavering even as a voice " all male and rich and promising - brought her uncertain gaze towards the intersection of the ally. Another man, this one dressed in rich reds and browns beneath the same damnable blue jacket, peered at the first with a wry grin upon his face. There were few people, she felt, who could pull off wry smirking as so honestly attractive. It looked right on him, the subtle angles of his face requiring such an expression to compliment the sharpness of his green eyes and the precise care given to the placement of his pale brown hair. "Couldn't wait for me? Saito I'm hurt, you know how much I was looking forward to killing these three." The green-eyed man chuckled lightly at his own words as he stepped forward, sidestepping the bodies that littered the ground with an ease that seemed almost unsightly. She wondered how it was possible for a laugh that sounded so deep and heady could sound so hollow of true mirth. The green eyes settled suddenly on her, and between the two men looking down upon her huddled, bloodied form she felt trapped and dizzy. "So who's your new friend?"

There was something in his voice, a warning tenor that struck her mind as wrong, and had her tightening her hold on her blood-slicked Kodachi instinctively. She didn't have the strength for another fight, but she'd be damned if she simply allowed for her fate to be delivered without at least an attempt of self-defense. The threatening shriek of a sword being torn from its sheath registered in the moment her hand had tightened upon her only weapon, her heart clenching at the sound she found her frightened gaze torn away from the two men and to a third looming figure that had just appeared before her. Her breath caught in her throat at the sight of the glinting sword aimed at her, the tall man behind it ethereal and handsome despite the clear danger he presented. A faraway " more than slightly hysterical " part of her mind spun around the improbability of all three men being so damn attractive. Honestly, in any other situation she would have been happy to be picked up by any one of them.

"If you try to run, I will kill you." The deep timber of his voice made two very different kind of chills run down her spine, and she mentally berated the part of her that enjoyed the sound of his words

even as the meaning of them terrified her to no end. His violet eyes narrowed dangerously upon her, flicking to her bloody hand upon the hilt of her weapon and with a nervous swallow she loosened her hold enough to have the sword he pointed at her retract slightly. She would not give up her hold on her weapon, but if he was telling her the conditions that would result in her death, he was not going to suddenly lop off her head. She didn't trust him, but she trusted the instincts burning at the back of her tired mind telling her to not panic. Swallowing down the terror, she offered a slow, small nod and "making her intentions obvious, slowly forced herself to shaky feet.

"Who?" Her voice was a croak, and what little was left of his faded as a rush of dizziness swamped her. Black spots danced and fluttered before her eyes, obscuring her vision as her head swam and her body shook. Her limbs felt numb, the wound in her arm "momentarily forgotten" suddenly flared to life and burned with a new intensity. Tightening her hold on her Kodachi just so that she did not drop it, she felt her balance fail, her shoulder hitting the metal of the dumpster hard as she listed to the side. Wincing she forced back the need to sit back down, curl up and let the darkness consume her, looking back up to the three men. "What?_what were?" She gritted her teeth, legs weakening beneath her, and scratched at the rusted, peeling dumpster at her side in the attempt to stay upright. The world dipped and blurred around her, the black dots growing and merging, overtaking her vision completely as her thoughts slipped away from her completely. Distantly she realized that her numb hands lost grip upon her weapon and it had clattered to the ground, and the weightlessness of falling settled in just before her grasp on the world completely slipped away.

Later, when she awoke, and settled into the odd, dangerous life of Shinsengumi, she looked upon that night with wonder. Amazement touching at her mind and heart at the knowledge of what that single, horrific night had led her to. The night that had changed the course of her life, of her very fate, forever.

End
file.